



Gardening for bumblebees

Bumblebees and their young eat only nectar and pollen, and so are entirely dependent on an adequate supply of the right kinds of flowers through the year. As wildflowers have become scarce in the countryside, gardens can provide a stronghold for bumblebees and other wildlife, if the right plants are grown.



Gardens cover more than 1 million hectares of Britain, far exceeding the combined area of all our nature reserves. However, at present a lot of gardens are not especially friendly to wildlife. Many are covered with paving or decking, or are populated with exotic or highly cultivated garden flowers that produce little or no pollen and nectar, or keep it hidden away from the bees. Pansies, petunias, busy-lizzies and begonias undoubtedly add a splash of colour, but years of selection for increasingly showy blooms have resulted in the flowers losing their original function (to attract pollinating insects).

Instead, why not try growing traditional cottage garden flowers and native wildflowers. Many of these thrive and look superb in the garden. They are also easy to grow, generally being hardy and much more resistant to slugs and disease. Many wildflowers are already readily accepted as garden plants; foxgloves and bluebells are good examples. But there are many other lesser known wildflowers. Viper's bugloss, for example, produces tall, purple spikes that look stunning in an herbaceous border and positively drip nectar. Bumblebee species differ in the length of their tongues, and as a result prefer different flowers, so it's important to grow a range of different things. It is also essential to provide flowers throughout the bumblebee season from March to mid September. Please turn over for a list of suggested plants.

The table below suggests a selection of plants that would provide pollen and nectar throughout the bumblebee season. If everyone provided just one plant from each of the seasons shown in the table below, the future of our surviving bumblebee species would be a little more secure.

For further information, please see the BECT's book "Gardening for Bumblebees" by Prof. Dave Goulson, available from the Trust by post (£3 inc. P+P).

Flowering Time	Suggested Plants	
March and April	Bluebell Rosemary Dead-nettle Lungwort	Bugle Pussy willow Flowering currant Winter flowering heather
May and June	<i>Aquilegia</i> Laburnum <i>Geranium</i> <i>Campanula</i> <i>Ceanothus</i> Chives <i>Cotoneaster</i> Honeysuckle Sage Catmint	Foxglove Comfrey Lupin Monkshood Bird's foot trefoil Thyme Everlasting pea Everlasting wallflower Viper's bugloss Lesser knapweed
July and August	Buddleia Cornflower <i>Centaurea</i> <i>Delphinium</i> <i>Escallonia</i> Hollyhock Heathers	Lavender Rock-rose Scabious Marjoram Sea Holly Sunflower <i>Phacelia tanacetifolia</i>

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